PRESS STATEMENT:

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December 16th, 1962

WOOL INDUSTRY RE-ORGANIZATION

Last week I described the Wool Industry Bill and the organization that has been established to place the control of the Australian wool industry in the hands of woolgrowers where it rightly belongs. Although I indicated the keenest support for the new organization, I also indicated that the composition of the Conference was not ideal because the A.P.P.U. had not received a place on it. I accepted this position with the greatest reluctance, as did other members like Dan MacKinnon, Jim Forbes, Bert Kelly, Alec Buchanan, to name but a few. We accepted it because the Australian Wool and Meat Producers’ Federation and the Australian Woolgrowers’ and Graziers’ Council had threatened to walk off the Conference if the A.P.P.U. were given even token representation on the Conference. I believed and still believe this to be an unreasonable attitude on behalf of the major organizations. Traditionally, they have been the only two organizations recognised in Government legislation because they were first on the scene and were taken to represent the interests of the wool industry.

Quite frankly, I was not prepared to call their bluff - if it was a bluff. It would have delayed getting this new organization into being, possibly for a year or more than a year. If the leaders of the Australian Wool and Meat Producers’ Federation meant what they said, they may have destroyed the organization entirely. The industry urgently needs the organization and the strength that it will give the industry. Therefore, although we were most concerned that the A.P.P.U. should be represented, I and my colleagues decided that the legislation would have to be accepted but that every pressure should be brought upon the two organizations to admit the A.P.P.U. to the Conference.

Let me briefly describe what has gone on about these negotiations. Firstly, we supported the claims of the A.P.P.U. for representation on the Conference because it has 25,000 woolgrower members in the States of Victoria, Tasmania, New South Wales and South Australia. It is a Federal organization. While it is the newer organization in the field, its leadership has shown an intelligent understanding of the Wool Industry’s problems. The Union’s leadership has shown itself fully equipped to take a part in the forum of the nation’s greatest industry.

The Government Members’ Wool Committee had discussions with the Chairman of the Australian Woolgrowers and Graziers’ Council, the President of the Australian Wool and Meat Producers’ Federation, and with the leaders of the A.P.P.U. We questioned the leaders of the two former organizations closely concerning the A.P.P.U. membership on the Conference. They were implacable in defence of their decision. When it was pointed out to the President of the Federation that the arguments he was using against the A.P.P.U. were very similar to the arguments that the Graziers once used against the Federation 25 or 30 years ago, he indicated to us that that was different. The Federation was now in and the Union was not. We put it to him and we believed that the Union has maintained its 25,000 membership for the simple reason that these particular growers are not satisfied with the leadership shown by either the Graziers’ or the Federation. Indeed, this was the reason for the Federation’s own birth many years ago because, formerly, the Graziers were the only people in the field.

The Union’s membership has maintained loyalty to its organization. Its strength can be judged from the fact that there are 43,000 members of the Australian Wool and Meat Producers’ Federation and 22,000 or 23,000 graziers throughout the whole of Australia.

The organizations that have formed the Wool Industry Conference to manage the affairs of the industry have left the constitution of their Conference wide enough to include other organizations at some future time. I have read these clauses in the constitution of this Conference and I believe the A.P.P.U.
conforms to the requirements that are put forward. I hope the leaders of the A.P.P.U. will therefore begin to set out their claim to membership of the Conference.

It may be said that the Government should have made this Conference a statutory body and as such, the Government would then only have to say there will be 25 graziers, 25 Federation people and a certain number of A.P.P.U. men on the Conference. This is true, but I have already said that the two entrenched organisations had threatened to walk off the Conference if the Government took this course. In the interests of the Wool Industry in its fight to maintain and preserve world markets and in its fight to improve the marketing system, it was vital that this legislation be passed before Christmas. Indeed, the A.P.P.U. recognised this. In a statement recently issued by the Federal President, Mr. Heffernan said that the well being of the wool industry is of paramount importance and, with this thought in mind, the A.P.P.U. recognized that any action taken by the Union that would delay setting up the Wool Board would not be in the best interests of Australian Woolgrowers. He went on to say that the Union was fully aware of its responsibility towards its members and would continue to press strongly for membership of the Wool Industry Conference at the earliest opportunity by every means at its disposal.

This statement has been commended by the Minister for Primary Industry and by the Minister for Trade. They have both drawn attention to the fact that the Union has placed the wool industry first in its thinking. This has shown a responsibility to the industry as a whole which should not be lost upon the other organisations. By this act alone and the manner of their acceptance of the present position the Union has proved the justness of its claim to membership of the Conference.

However, neither the Government nor the other most concerned in this issue were prepared to run the risk of destroying the whole organization which had taken so long to come into being. In this context we must remember that only a year ago the Graziers and the Federation did not get along too well together. Now, at the top level, they are co-operating very well and working in the interests of the industry. They both put the view that if you injected a third party, dissension could be caused. However, if they get used to working together and can develop a greater basis of trust, then they may be more ready to accept A.P.P.U. membership on the Conference at some future stage. They have left their constitution wide enough to accept them and I am quite certain that the Union will put their intentions in this matter to the test.

It is not much consolation to the loyal and energetic members of the A.P.P.U. to say to them that it is always difficult for newcomers to break through in a field of this kind but it is still true that if their leadership continues in the way that it has in recent years and if they maintain their membership and their vigour, I believe that they must achieve a place on the Conference.

The Government has made it quite clear that they want to see them on the Conference. The Government was not prepared to dictate to the industry for fear of the reactions of the other organizations and because it is not the Government's policy to dictate to industries. I have said before that there are growers who when they want something done would like a Government to step forward and tell the industry what to do. However, if you once set a precedent of dictation the next time the Government may be dictating something that the industry as a whole does not want and this would not be so good. Growers as a whole would not accept this. However, the Government's powers of persuasion will, I am sure, be directed towards placing the Union on the Conference.

The Prime Minister himself had a meeting with all the organisational leaders, including the Union's leaders, to try and achieve this end. Present efforts have not succeeded but continued pressure may carry results. The failure of the two major woolgrowing organizations to recognize even a token number of Union members on the Conference is the only blot on a magnificent piece of legislation which has taken the wool industry further along the road to a good and successful organization than any other single act.